# HOW TO WRITE WELL

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# HOW TO WRITE WELL

*By*
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# PREFACE

MY aim in writing this book is not to write about writing and writers, but to give some practical workshop advice. This book is designed for those who earn their living by writing and those who wish to do so. It is to enable them to earn more money by writing—to make them professionals instead of amateurs.

There is nothing academic nor historical in these pages. They are as plain and practical as bread and cheese. Every chapter is meant to improve the technique of those who write to entertain or to influence the minds of average people.

Almost all writing is amateurish—dull and unfinished. Very few writers learn their trade. In France, writing is an art. In Great Britain and America, it is a muddle of words. We in the British Isles have a low conception of what writing ought to be. We have very little technique. We have only one Kipling —only one Barrie.

The writing in our daily press is journalese —crude stuff dashed off in a hurry. It lives for a day. Much of it should not have been born. It is either the bare unadorned story of events or the expression of opinion in a dull and heavy style. These two styles—the style of the reporter and the style of the editor, have created low standards of writing. Thousands of us can write badly. Very few can write well.

It cannot be promised that almost any educated person can become skilled as a writer. Probably not more than ten per cent. can. But everyone who can write at all can learn to write better.

People of middle age may learn. William de Morgan, who won fame as a novelist, did not write a line of fiction until he was sixty years old. Keats, who died at twenty-six, was an exception to all rules. We have had only one Keats. Few people are born writers. Most Masters of Words have had to toil hard to earn their distinction.

What a grown person learns to-day he must learn quickly. Children have plenty of time to learn. Grown people have not. We have very little leisure. We have many distractions

and most of us have to earn money while we are learning.

It is not true to say that the best way to learn to write is to write. The best writers are seldom self-taught. They are those who learn from others, as singers and musicians do.

The art of good writing is carried on from Master to Master. Every Master adds a little to what he learns. And in this way a body of technique is built up.

If I may mention my own pedigree as a writer, I may say that I learned from Brisbane, who learned from the Paris School of Journalism, which learned from Guy de Maupassant, who learned from Flaubert.

At twenty years of age, I wrote badly and with great difficulty. I began by reading De Quincy's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* and Emerson's *Essays* and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. Every morning for a year I studied one page and tried to rewrite it in my own language.

At twenty-four I was the assistant editor of the *Encyclopædia of Social Reform*. At thirty, for six months, I was the assistant of Arthur Brisbane, who was the most highly paid journalist in America. Then, for four years,

I was on the editorial staff of the *New York World*, under Joseph Pulitzer.

After this experience in journalism, I became a writer for magazines, for the reason that they paid higher prices and demanded a higher standard of technique. A magazine writer has time to write as well as he can. Again I had to learn. I persevered until I rose to the height where I received fivepence a word—as much as £200 for a single article.

Then I discovered that there was a still higher standard of writing. I met Mr. J. E. Powers, the ablest advertising writer of his generation. He was the first advertising writer who received £21 a day and some days he wrote only forty or fifty words.

I went to his study and watched him write. He would first study the goods that he had been asked to sell. He would write down a sentence describing them. Then he would study every word. He would use no word that had a vague meaning or two meanings. He would rewrite and rewrite until his sentence was as clear as a diamond. Some of his sentences made his clients rich.

After having created a style, I kept it up to date by reading the best-selling novels. I

made it a point to read one novel a week. I developed my style by writing books. This book is my fifty-sixth. Every writer, in my opinion, must keep on learning and writing as long as he lives.

Every successful writer must put his style above all. He must not write books quickly to please his publishers. He must wait until a book is in him before he writes it. He must not go all out for production, as too many good writers do.

As this book is intended for general use, I shall not deal with such matters as the principles of construction—unity, mass, coherence, etc. I shall only point out that he who wishes to write perfect English has a long way to go. I am in this book dealing only with those things that every writer should know, in order to become a professional writer.

As to grammar and punctuation, I need say little or nothing. Most writers know enough to write correctly. Happily, their mistakes will be corrected by proofreaders. Very few writers know as much about grammar and punctuation as proofreaders do.

The fact is that a good writer need not be a slave to the petty little rules of grammar.

# HOW TO WRITE WELL

A good writer makes grammar as he writes. The hair-splitters of literature tell us that we must not use the split infinitive. Why not? This is an old and out-of-date rule. We may say "to happily write" if we wish. The split infinitive is often the one best way to express a meaning.

Twenty years ago, a learned book devoted twenty pages to the discussion of the phrase "The house is being built." The right way, said the author, is to say "The house is building." What nonsense!

All good writing is designed to produce a certain effect—to make an impression upon the mind or heart of a reader. So, just as a clever painter uses other tools as well as brushes, to secure his effects, a good writer may, to a certain extent, ignore the rules that he learned in the Grammar Class.

How to write effectively—that is the practical problem which this book attempts to solve. And it is the sincere hope of the author that many writers may be helped by this book to become eventually Masters of Words.

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The Dell, Church Road
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# THE POWER OF WORDS

## Chapter I

# THE POWER OF WORDS

THERE are over 400,000 words in the English language. No other language has as many. An educated man knows about 15,000 words. Many illiterate people use 1,000 and no more. Even Shakespeare used only 20,000. Even the Bible contains only 10,000.

Monkeys, it is said, have a vocabulary of forty words. Thrushes, I have noticed, have at least thirty different notes. Dogs have a crude language of barks and growls. And a number of animals are quite dumb.

Ants, which have so much intelligence, have no audible language, but they can express certain ideas by means of their antennæ. They have a language of touch, not talk. They live in little towns of darkness and silence.

The language of any nation is one of the best tests of its intelligence. Words express thoughts. The nation that has the most words

can best express its thoughts. Many a nation is being held back to-day—China, for instance, because its words are so few and so ill-adapted to express scientific and industrial ideas. I have been struck with the fact that most European nations have no word for "Efficiency"

As for English, it is a composite language. We have robbed the whole world to enrich our language. English has become a world language and will eventually be spoken almost everywhere.

About 50 per cent. of it is Saxon, 30 per cent. is Latin and 5 per cent. is Greek. Many words have come in from the French. And in the last twenty years, many new words have come from America. We take new words wherever we find them. We popularize them in books, magazines and the daily press. That is why we now have the most complete language in the world.

From the Arabs we have taken "algebra" and "zero." From the Hindoos we have taken "bungalow" and "calico." From the Persians we have taken "chess" and "caravan." From the Turks we have taken "tulip" and "sash." From the Chinese we have taken

" junk " and " satin." From the Red Indians we have taken " tobacco " and " wigwam." From the Malays we have taken " sago " and " bamboo." And so on.

The time has come when we should appreciate the English language—study it—master it as far as we can. Not one of us knows 10 per cent. of it.

Ever since the Norman Conquest, which banished the English language from the Court, we have failed to honour and appreciate our own language. We have put Greek and Latin and French ahead of it. We even print our menus in French.

In our schools and universities, we turn out young people who have learned a pitiful smattering of Greek, Latin, French and perhaps German, and who know only a small percentage of the words in their own language. We actually regard it as a sign of culture if a man knows a few Greek and Latin phrases, or if he can babble a few words in bad German or worse French. We do not measure a man's culture by his knowledge of his own language, which is the one best test of his intelligence.

In our system of education, we have never aimed at making young people intelligent nor

efficient. Our purpose has been to give them what we call a cultured accent and to teach them a few quite useless things which mark them out as "cultured." We have tried to create an aristocracy of the educated few, such as exists in China. We have never, as yet, tried to make our young people clever, useful and efficient. Actually, our cast-iron system of education tends to hammer the originality and creativeness out of them and to make them ordinary and incompetent.

I venture to say that life is too short to learn more than one language. There are too many more important things to do than learn languages. We who speak English should concentrate all our attention upon our own language, so that we can speak and write it more ably and thoroughly than we do.

In the business world, we have always undervalued the power of words. Trade and commerce were dumb for centuries, until advertising sprang up and gave them a voice. Business men have ignored the fact that most self-governing countries are led by talkers and writers. They have overlooked this truth—that political democracy means the rule of the men who have the power of words—the politicians and the journalists. If trade and

commerce are to be protected from the attacks of voters, business men must learn to write and talk.

Business itself is largely managed by means of conferences and conversations. Much of it is writing and talk. The man whose words are few and badly chosen is handicapped. He may succeed by sheer force and will-power. But his task is made much harder by the fact that he is inarticulate.

Often, in the business world, you will hear a man talking like this :

" I want to—er-er-er show you, ahem—achugh, one of our ugh-ugh new engines. Ahem-achugh ! We have um-um thoroughly um—ah tried them—I mean er-er-er tested them, and a-a-a-a—— ! "

Now, this sort of semi-articulate grunting is not speech. It is not talking. It is only an effort to talk. Many business men are guilty of it, and it is a serious handicap to them in both business and social life.

All of us, whether in business life or not, must learn to talk and write more correctly and more fluently. A clumsy use of words is a defect. Words are power, just as much as

capital is. And now that all trades and professions are becoming international, the dominant nation will be the one that can best express itself.

We should appreciate language. It is fossil history. Every word has a story of its own. Mr. Selfridge once said to me that there are 250,000 different things in his great store and everyone of them has made somebody rich. Everyone of them has a history and very likely a romance. The same can be said of words.

The one simple word, "car," has a history at least 2,000 years old. The word "idiot," which originally meant in Greece a private citizen, has a history that goes back for more than 4,000 years. The word "ebony" has a meaning that the ebony trade has forgotten, to its loss. It came originally from a Hebrew word meaning stone. It is the only wood that is in the same class as marble.

We should study the language of to-day more than the language of the past. Why? Because language evolves. No one can learn to write well or to interest and influence this generation, by studying Greek and Latin, or Chaucer and Spenser.

The meanings of words are constantly

changing. Every field was once an "acre." All food was once called "meat." The word "starve" meant to die any manner of death. A "duke" was once any leader. And any book was once a "libel."

The language of to-day has escaped from the control of the "purists." What was good grammar yesterday may not be good grammar to-day. There was a time when it was correct to say—"Put them things away." It was once right to say—"I will axe him a question." The word "axe," meaning "ask," is used in Wyclif's Bible. So, very likely, it will some day be correct to say—"It is me." Grammar changes. It is not like the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Grammar does not make writers. On the contrary, good writers make grammar.

It has too often been said that the study of Greek and Latin trains the mind. The answer is that it does not. It mistrains the mind. It inclines the mind towards antiquity and away from the greater wonders and larger ideas of to-day. A man must above all keep in touch with his own generation, if he wishes to be creative and successful.

Every man, even if he be a manufacturer or

a scientist, should read the books and magazines of his day. He should know what the people of his own generation are reading. He should read the good new books, as well as the good old ones. If he has no time to read both, he should read the new.

Every purposeful man should develop his power of using words efficiently, in both writing and speaking. As Bacon said—"Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man." A man who has studied the art of writing is more likely to be careful and accurate. Many a Managing Director would do well to put his instructions in writing.

The power of a good writer, either in business or literature, can scarcely be overestimated. One well-written full-page advertisement may make a business successful. One well-written catalogue may create a Mail Order Department. One well-written story may make a writer famous. One well-written leading article may upset a Government.

We are influenced more than we know by what we read. A well-written book transports us, for the time, into another world. We say that we are "lost in a book." If it is a book

of travel in Spain, we live in Spain while we are reading it. If it is a biography, we move along, year by year, with the career of a great man. If it is a novel, we live for a time with the group of people whose lives are being portrayed.

"A good book," said Milton, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." This is not as true to-day as it was when Milton was alive. There is now a flood of books, written by the foolish as well as by the wise. The average book is not on a much higher level than the average newspaper. But there are still a number of good books which no alert man should miss.

What Byron said is still true, that—"words are things, and a small drop of ink, falling like dew upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think."

The power of words! What can words do? They can bring wealth and fame and the pleasure of creation to those who know how to use them cleverly. Built together with the pen of a genius, words are literature. Used efficiently by a business man, words create markets. Spoken by a statesman, words are

power and shape the course of a nation's history.

Words express our thoughts, our feelings, our history, our ideals, our discoveries. They create intelligence and laughter and ambition. They prevent us from being dumb animals. They lift the curse of dumbness. They raise us to the highest levels of life.

"In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God and the WORD was God." THE WORD!

# THE TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

## Chapter II

# THE TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

### I

AS we have seen in the preceding chapter, there are great possibilities of skill in writing, as many as there are in music or architecture or engineering or finance. The greatest writers become immortal. Their fame lives, long after we have forgotten the names of the millionaires and politicians who usurped the attention of the day.

We under-estimate skill in writing, for the reason that we all imagine that we learned writing at school. We wrote crude little compositions. Later, we wrote letters—commonplace worthless letters. Many of us, later still, wrote stilted clumsy letters and advertisements and booklets for business purposes. We may even have had some of our amateurish writing printed. The printer refuses nothing.

So, this gave us the impression that we knew how to write—a totally false impression. We have come to regard writing as something that any educated person can do. All manner of people are writing autobiographies and advertising matter and business reports. The art of writing, consequently, has been degraded. The standards have been lowered. A mass of rubbish is being printed. Just as the flood of cheap gramophones and loud speakers has dulled our ears to the beauty of good music, so has this flood of printed rubbish dulled our brains so that we fail to appreciate good writing.

Everyone has a voice, but few can sing well. Everyone has legs, but few can run a hundred yards in twelve seconds. And everyone can write in a crude uninteresting way. Very few in any nation can write well.

There is no national SCHOOL OF WRITING, as there ought to be. There is no group of Masters. There are no examinations. There are no Diplomas. Apart from the Nobel prizes, there are no honours nor rewards. Now and then, the Government confers a title upon a writer, but these titles, like the rain, seem to fall alike upon "the just and the unjust." They are not given as rewards for

technique. Usually, they are given for some political reason.

Consequently, we have no source of authority in the matter of writing, as there is in France. The Masters are messed up with the authors of the " best sellers." The popular writers make more money than the ablest. We have even come to such a low stage of appreciation that a really valuable and unique book is likely to be refused by the publishers.

Just as grand opera is now unappreciated and in danger of being driven out of existence by the crude, semi-barbaric music of to-day, so is good writing in danger. The time has come when the Masters must rally to the defence of the English language.

The common talk of the streets and public-houses and brothels is being made into books. The most popular books are those that deal with crime and lust. Novels are being degraded to the level of American films. Writers are gathering their materials in the filth of our civilization. And all this tends to prostitute the art of writing and to lower the standards of what we call literature.

When a writer of genius does appear, he is goaded by his publishers to produce more and

more, until the quality of his writing becomes worse and worse. Poor Jack London, for instance, who might have written a masterpiece, was goaded to produce "best sellers." Many authors are tempted in this way and the world is the poorer.

The most perfect instance of good writing in 1928, in my opinion, was *The Bridge of San Luiz Rey*. It may be the only book that was printed in 1928 that will still be in print in 2028. It is a book of deathless literature, unique in plot and perfect in style. It managed to fight its way to financial success, but there was no Academy of Writers—no national source of authority, to point it out as an exceptional book.

The fact is that writing is an art, as truly as sculpture is, or painting, or music. It must be learned. The best writers are made as well as born.

"True ease in writing comes from
Art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have
learned to dance."

Writing requires both aptitude and practice. It requires a long study of the writing of the ablest living writers. It requires a long

apprenticeship. Perfect sentences cannot be made by amateurs. And a vocabulary cannot be acquired by conversation alone.

To a beginner, I would say—study the daily paper. There is almost always a little good writing in it. Appoint yourself a judge. Decide which is the best written article in the paper. Then study that article.

Study the headlines with especial care. They are written by a skilled man, who is well paid. He is an expert in the art of condensation and in the making of a vivid phrase. Many a headline writer might become an able author, if he were not nailed fast to the routine of his job.

Study, too, the writing of the special writers of the daily press, who are allowed to sign their names to their articles. They can write more cleverly than the reporters can. They are allowed more time. They are not compelled to spend most of the day in running about, as reporters are. Usually, they are reporters who have learned how to write well. They are well paid. Most of what they write is timely and interesting and worth reading.

Many dramatic critics, not all, are worth

studying as writers. They have acquired a certain elegance of style. They do not use the stale phrases that express praise and criticism. They write for one another, rather than for the public. There is an intense rivalry among them, to see who can write the most brilliant review of a great play. Eventually, most of them become egoistic and hypercritical, as might naturally be expected. The adulation of actors and actresses turns their heads. But this much at least must be said, that they polish their writing. They labour over a phrase.

As to the anonymous writers of the leading articles in our daily press, they are in a class by themselves. They belong to a sort of Civil Service among writers. They are expected to be dull and non-committal, and they exceed all expectations. They write essays that few people read. They use the longest words and the longest paragraphs. No doubt, if one of them dared to be interesting, he would be discharged.

Our daily papers have no editors, in the French sense. In France, the leading article is of more importance than the news. It is one of the events of the day. It is studied and keenly discussed. But in Great Britain the

leading article is designed mainly to maintain the dignity of the paper.

The most finished writing is to be found in books and magazines. None of it is routine work. It is printed because it has some merit in itself. It is saleable writing, therefore it should be studied carefully. Every writer, even the most original, should learn from other writers. No one can discover all the points of good writing for himself. As well might a gardener try to learn botany from one geranium. Hundreds of great writers have built up a body of technique, which no ambitious writer can afford to ignore.

No one could write an O. Henry story except O. Henry Hundreds have tried and failed. Yet his method should be studied. He acquired his skill in a cruel school—in jail —in South American hiding places—among criminals—in the slums and the ends of the earth. His articles were a sort of revenge upon a world that had treated him harshly.

If you want to write like O. Henry, you must pay the price that he paid for his tuition. You must learn as he learned and suffer as he suffered. He sold all his stories at a high price, but he sold them below cost.

As to plagiarism, I need only say this, that there is a wide difference between stealing and improving. We must take ideas from others. Shakespeare (or Bacon) stole most of his plots. But he improved them until they were his own. His plays were no more like the originals than baseball is like rounders.

To take an idea as it stands, in its original words, is to plagiarize, but to take it and develop it is another matter. No man of originality need concern himself about plagiarizing.

The First Commandment of the writing profession is—thou shalt not be DULL. Be slangy, if you like. You will at once double the number of your readers. You may even be ungrammatical. The author whose books have had the largest sale in Great Britain during the last thirty years, paid very little attention to grammar.

You may touch the edge of vulgarity. You may plunge into the depths of it. You may do almost anything, if we may judge by the "best sellers" of to-day. But if you are dull, you are done. Dullness is the unpardonable sin.

Generally speaking, the writing that holds

the attention of people to-day is the writing that is brisk and breezy. Breeziness in writing is not a fault, as some Professors of literature would have us believe.

It is conversational. It is personal. It is always interesting and readable. It is direct, too. It goes straight to the point. It may be overdone, but it is better to overdo it than not to do it at all.

The fact is that style in writing has changed. It is always changing. It leaps ahead of the text-books. A book on the art of writing must be revised every ten years. No one can learn to write to-day by reading Shakespeare and the Bible.

To-day, for instance, a sentence does not need a verb. It may consist of two words only, such as "New styles," or "Strong men." Such short sentences catch the attention and drive an idea into the mind. They are often used by the new novelists.

One of the old rules was—never end a sentence with a preposition. None of the Victorian writers would have done this. De Quincey would have sooner cut off one of his fingers than cut off a sentence after a preposition. But it is done very often to-day. It is

now permissible to write—"the strangest thing I have ever heard of." This is better than—"the strangest thing of which I have ever heard."

To be effective, writing must be in the style of the present day. Do not take any Victorian writer as a model. Do not develop your style from the novels of long ago. The style which suited people who rode in stage-coaches and laughed at Punch and Judy shows will not suit people who ride in express trains, motor-cars and aeroplanes, and who have seen Cochran's revues.

You can learn very little from Sir Walter Scott. Most of his novels, to tell the truth, are incredibly dull for the first hundred pages. You can learn more from Dickens, but fully half of his books are quite unreadable to-day. Of all his books, *The Tale of Two Cities* will probably live the longest. I have found it to be the most permanently pleasing of all novels. I find that I can read it with pleasure every four or five years.

A writer must read many of the new books — those that have been favourably reviewed. He should read the "best sellers," not so much to imitate their style as to see what the

public likes. No one can be wholly indifferent to the likes and dislikes of the public, if he wishes his writing to be effective.

What we mean by style in writing is not mere eccentricity. It is not an effort to be unique. It means suiting the way of writing to the ideas that are expressed.

Carlyle's style was bad, for instance, but it suited his ideas. He was like a man in a thunderstorm at night. He saw glimpses of the future when the lightning flashed. Naturally, his style was rugged, irregular, exclamatory. If he were alive to-day, and wrote in such a style, his essays would be rejected by the editors.

A good style is the perfect expression of thought. It may be quiet, explosive, dignified, frivolous, rhythmical or expository. It may be virile or poetical. It may be what it pleases, if it is the perfect expression of thought.

*The Athenæum*, in reviewing my book—*The Romance of Steel*, said that I had developed a style that suited this age of machinery and commerce. Whether the reviewer meant this as praise or criticism, I do not know, but I took it as praise. At any rate, it proved that the style suited the theme, as style should

always do. If I had written a book on flowers in such a style, it would have been absurd.

Style springs partly from the writer himself and partly from his theme. A good writer, like a good actor, can adapt himself to his task. The range of his style, inevitably, depends upon the range of his personality.

As Goethe once said—" If any man wishes to write a clear style, let him first be clear in his thoughts ; and if he would write in a noble style, let him first possess a noble soul."

A man's style springs from his own nature, as well as from the technique that he learns from books and from the inspiration of his theme. Personality plus technique plus the theme—these three create the correct style.

In effective writing, in these quick days, there must be a sense of action and speed. A good writer hurls his reader along. There is a sense of breathlessness in a well-written article or book. As we say, it GRIPS the attention of the reader. It holds him. It has an influence upon him. This is the one most valuable quality in the writing of all sales literature, and it is the quality that is most rarely found.

Effective writing must be tense, electric, vivid. As far as possible, it must be pictorial. The best words to use are those that can be visualized. If the page is full of moving pictures that flash on the brain, the writing has been well done.

The most popular entertainment to-day in all countries is the cinema. Moving and talking pictures! Writers must now compete with these. They make it vastly more difficult to interest and please the public.

People want pictures. The success of the cinema and the illustrated papers and magazines proves this. Consequently, the most popular writing in the future will be that which consists of word-pictures. The most effective writers will be those who can make us SEE what is happening as we read.

There will eventually be a new style in writing. Anyone can foresee that who observes the signs of the times. It will be called PICTURIZATION, very likely. Make no mistake about that. And the leaders of this new style of writing will be the most influential writers of their day.

To write well in the future, a writer must see vividly and think clearly and have a tense

and virile style. Ruskin once said, in his exaggerating way—"the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to SEE something, and tell in a plain way what he saw." There is much truth in this. A writer must develop this art of visualization, if he wants to compete for the public attention against moving and talking pictures.

The public, to-day, has no patience. It is not simple-minded and easy to please. It is complex-minded and hard to please. It has seen plays that cost £20,000 and more to produce. Even the children have seen the most costly and elaborate pantomimes, such as no King ever saw in previous centuries.

On the streets there are moving coloured pictures in electric light. In the humblest homes there is the new marvel of wireless sets. The daily newspapers are full of wonders and scandals and crime and excitements. The great department stores, open to everyone, have become Paradises, displaying merchandise from every part of the world.

The public has become blase. It is sated with interesting and amusing things. The simple life has become a thing of the past. Very few things receive more than a glance.

Everyone is driven along by a series of pushes. In every trade and profession there is the keenest of competition. There are everywhere more sellers than buyers. There is a passion for novelty and style. And all this means that a writer must be clever and entertaining and in touch with the wishes of the public if he wants to sell his goods.

The public is surfeited with reading matter. Very few people read the whole of a magazine or a newspaper. They have become fastidious and critical. They read only what interests them. They lack the power of concentration. They flit like humming-birds from page to page. As you can see, it is no small task for a writer to catch and hold the attention of such people.

This is why a writer must not be dull. This is why he must not use such stale phrases as " an aching void," " bated breath," " briny deep," and " a bolt from the blue." The moment he uses a stale phrase, the interest of the reader slackens. Unless he is held fast by vivid phrases, his eyes will begin to wander.

Because of this new habit of glance-reading, the first paragraph of an article is very important. It is a good newspaper rule that the

most important or sensational fact must be told in the first paragraph. Start with the loudest bang—that is what a good reporter does.

Every well-written long article in a newspaper begins with the new and most striking facts and ends with the oldest and least important. This is not the established rule in the writing of books, but it is always a good way to compel attention and attract readers. It is a good rule for all advertising booklets, sales letters and advertisements. Start with the loudest bang.

In the writing of a non-fiction book, the most important fact should be put in the Preface. Years ago, I learned that the Preface is apt to make or prevent the sale of the book. A good Preface will double the sale. Very few writers are aware of this. Their Prefaces are usually the dullest parts of their books.

In a well-written chapter of a book, the subject is developed. The first part of the chapter prepares the way. It is introductory. The most important statement should come at the end, not at the beginning. The loudest bang comes last. There should be a climax, not an anti-climax.

II

How to write serious matter in the form of a narrative—how to make a story of it, that is one of the problems of a serious writer. There must always, in every effective book, be a movement of thought. That is why a book that is a collection of short essays usually is a bad seller. There is no movement forward. The interest of the reader slackens and the book is put down before the reader has finished it.

The most effective way to secure a sense of movement is to dramatize the facts and ideas. Introduce action. Use words of movement, such as " suddenly," " at once," " there they were," " why ? " " what was the result ? " " it was flung aside," " in a moment it was done," " the curtain rose on a new scene," " a strange situation appeared," etc.

Also, it goes without saying that a writer must in these days avoid evasiveness. People have no time to solve brain-twisters. Be clear. Too many of the sentences, even in business books, remind you of the sentence in *Alice in Wonderland*—" Things often turn out to be different to what they would have been if they hadn't been otherwise than as

you expected they were going to be." Such sentences are used by politicians, lawyers and muddy-minded people. They should never be written at all.

It is a strange fact that while the public has become blase and sated with novelties, at the same time it has remained simple and child-like. An effective political speech to-day must be on a lower level than the speeches of Pitt and Disraeli and Gladstone.

In spite of the flood of printed matter and the free libraries and the brain-stimulating influences of to-day, people apparently have remained simple-minded. They have not become thinkers. The mass of people, mentally, are still children—a generation of children to whom Science and Industry have given a most marvellous assortment of new toys.

Few people to-day have the tenacity to read Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* or Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*. Few read these solid books except students, who are compelled against their will to wade through them.

People have become bright, but shallow. They prefer simple, predigested ideas. They cannot fasten their attention upon a great

theme and follow it through. Philosophy has gone out of fashion. The mass of people are running about and looking at small glittering things. If Adam Smith and Locke were alive and gave a lecture in London, there would not be a hundred people in the audience. There might not even be a hundred unless there were a band at the door.

Writing must be easy to read. It must not be heavy, ornate or profound, if the writer wishes to have a large number of readers. If castor oil is to be administered to people who need it, it must be given with raspberry juice. People are seeking pleasure, not wisdom. Writers must never forget that.

" Of course, after all," says George Ade, " the big trick is to say what you have to say as simply and directly as possible without straining for effects." While people do not strive for wisdom, they do want to know the truth. That is one of the hopeful signs of the times.

A book like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, for instance, became a " best seller " because it photographed the real brutal savagery of war, as shown in the lives of five private soldiers. It showed war as it actually is, in

all its nakedness. It was the simple unexpurgated truth.

The one best way to attain simplicity is to use short words. Short sentences and short paragraphs, too. They keep the reader interested. They swing him along. Every writer will do well to use as short words and sentences as he can. There are few ideas that are too big to be told in simple words.

John Bright once said—" Few words, short words, words of Saxon origin, always pleased me, and expressed in the most earnest and forcible manner what I wished to say." Most of John Bright's great history-making speeches were mainly in words of one syllable.

Most paragraphs should not have more than five lines in a newspaper or magazine article and not more than ten lines in a book. The eye tires of a long paragraph. The reader's mind begins to wander. A well-written article or book is a series of little pushes. Every paragraph is a push.

Many Professors of literature warn writers against a " jerky " style. The answer is that a jerky style is better than a heavy, slow, dignified style. Modern readers do not mind jerkiness. It gives a sense of motion and

speed. They are accustomed to being jerked about in buses and motor-cars. They expect to be jerked.

Modern life is jerky all along the line. It is not at all like life was in the slow days of the last century. It moves along by a series of quick impulses. A business man's life is full of jerks and of small jobs quickly done. So, I venture to give it as my opinion that no writer should be afraid of jerkiness. He should only be afraid of being dull.

In the movement forward of the thought or the story, a paragraph is a step. One idea or fact leads to another. It should be a short step or the sense of a forward movement is lost.

Two ideas or facts should not be put in the same paragraph. Every paragraph should be a link in the chain of thought. It should be complete in itself. It should end on a strong word, if possible. And it should slant upward.

Robert Louis Stevenson, who was one of the few Masters of Words, almost invariably used simple language. Here is the beginning of his essay on " Ordered South " :

" By a curious irony of Fate, the places to

which we are sent when health deserts us are often singularly beautiful. Often, too, they are places we have visited in former years, or seen briefly in passing by, and kept ever afterwards in pious memory; and we please ourselves with the fancy that we shall repeat many vivid and pleasurable sensations, and take up again the thread of our enjoyment in the same spirit as we let it fall."

Here are 79 words and 52 are words of one syllable. There is not one word that is not in common use, and yet there is grace and skill in the writing.

Take another instance of simplicity from Stevenson, the beginning of his essay on "Walking Tours":

"It must not be imagined that a walking tour, as some would have us fancy, is mainly a better or worse way of seeing the country. There are many ways of seeing landscapes quite as good; and none more vivid, in spite of canting dilettantes, than from a railway train. But landscape on a walking tour is quite accessory. He who is indeed of the brotherhood does not voyage in quest of the picturesque, but of certain jolly humours—of the hope and spirit with which the march

begins at morning, and the peace and spiritual repletion of the evening's rest."

Here are 101 words and 71 are words of one syllable. There are only two words that are not in common use, yet the rhythm and delicacy of the writing could scarcely be improved.

A writer should never use an abstract word, if he can avoid it. Never use such words as "fundamentally," "essentially," "primarily," "economic," "philosophic," etc.

Avoid every academic word or phrase as though it were poison. It stops the reader's interest. It fogs the average mind. It destroys the vividness of the sentence. At once, it makes your article pompous, dignified and dull.

An adjective is better than an abstract noun. A verb is better than either, because it represents action. Put in plenty of verbs.

Abstract words are usually used to give an appearance of wisdom and superior learning. This is a mistake. Most of the noblest poems, articles and books are so simple, so perfectly written, so close to universal human nature,

that they are understood by almost everyone. Every Scot loves the poems of Burns.

If a writer uses abstract words, long sentences and a heavy academic style, he writes, as we say, above people's heads. But this does not mean that he is wise. It only means that he is a bad writer.

In a word, a writer must not be a pedant, if he wishes this generation of people to read what he writes. Pedants only write for one another. They know nothing of the real facts of to-day. All their information has been got secondhand. They do not live in the swirling currents of life. They live in quiet little pools of their own.

People now want facts more than fancies. They love above all the truth well told. There has sprung up a desire to know life—to know more and more of life. The spotlight is now being turned everywhere. People are inquisitive about other people. They want to know "how the other half lives."

Consequently, one of the first things that a writer must learn is how to SEE. He must take notice of what is going on around him. He must have the keenest eyes and be inter-

ested in everything. He must always be a thoughtful observer.

A Red Indian mother teaches her boy how to see. She trains him to look steadily at one thing and to notice what it is like. His life may depend upon his sharp eyes. But we civilized people have had no such training. We have dull eyes. We need to sharpen and develop our eyesight.

We should study common things. We should study the people in the bus. We should notice the shop windows and the selling process in the shops. This gives us a great fund of information for our writing. There is something worth seeing everywhere.

A writer will do well to write about people and places and events. He must appreciate the importance of details. As Flaubert once said—"The smallest thing has in it something unknown. Discover it. That is the way to become original."

In all writing, the first thing is to get an idea or a feeling or a fact IN, and the second thing is to get it OUT. A writer must be receptive. The best reporter is the one who can ask the best and the most questions. The best emotional writer is the one who can feel

vividly and strongly. The best instructive writer is the one who can gather the most data and present it in the clearest way.

First in, then out. A writer must be full. He is like a paper-making machine, which takes in wet pulp and presses and dries and smooths it into a sheet. He must have data, just as much as though he were an accountant. He need not try to deceive himself by thinking he is a genius and that a genius needs no data. The answer is that a genius does need data just as much as anyone else does. It is what a genius does with his data that shows his creativeness.

A writer must study people. He must be a specialist in human nature if he wishes to widen the scope of his influence. He must move about among his fellow human-beings and he must notice—notice—notice.

He need not study psychology from books, as most of the books on psychology are written by Professors, who delight in classification and in making simple things abstruse. But he must study psychology in action. He must notice motives, emotions, behaviour—how people react under various conditions.

A hermit can never be a great writer.

Neither can a man who is self-centred and who despises the people among whom he lives. There was one Schopenhauer, as an exception to this rule. But there has never been a demand for a second one.

We might even go so far as to say that good writing is generally an APPRECIATION of some phase of human life. A good writer sees values where ordinary people see none. A Kipling sees a ship and forthwith writes an epic of ships—*The Ship that Found Herself*. A Jack London owns a dog and forthwith writes an epic of dogs.

The true writer is one who sees more than anyone else sees and by his skill in the use of words he opens peoples eyes to the marvellously interesting and valuable things by which they are surrounded.

What we see every day we do not see. Most of us do not. "We walk and grope in seas of light." There is heroism all about us, and pathos and courage and nobility and things that are incredibly marvellous. The facts of real life are vastly more interesting and wonderful than any of the fairy tales, but people stand in the midst of these facts with dull eyes

and see none of them until they are pointed out by a writer.

Millions of people use the telephone, but how few appreciate the wonder of it. They take it for granted, as though it were the dead branch of a tree. But a writer comes along and says :

" Here is a tiny disc of sheet-iron. I speak. It shudders. It has a different shudder for every sound. It has thousands of millions of different shudders. There is a second disc many miles away, perhaps three thousand miles away. Between the two discs runs a copper wire. As I speak, a thrill of electricity flits along the wire. This thrill is moulded by the shudder of the disc. It makes the second disc shudder. And the shudder of the second disc reproduces my voice. But how —not all the scientists of the world can tell."

Writers are the eyes of the human race. They describe what they see. They render an inestimable service to the blind. They teach people the worth of human life and of civilization. A nation without great writers can neither understand nor respect itself.

A writer must know books. Yes. His

whole life must be spent with them. But he must not be a type-reader only. He must be able to read faces as well as books. He must read people and nature. He must be one of the most interested playgoers while the drama of human life is on.

A really great book is not often created out of a man's imagination, as an oyster creates a pearl out of itself. There have been such books and many have been falsely called great. Most of them have been morbid and many of them have been irrational. A great sane book is almost always produced by a writer who has gathered in his data from outside himself.

Much can be learned from old people and from children. Old women are the wisest people in the world. They know the real things that matter. They have pulled aside the veils that cover the mysteries of life. They are no longer fooled by appearances, as most young people are.

Old women know the human heart more completely than any men do. They have a sympathy and a patience that pass any masculine understanding. They have learned how to separate the gold from the dross. They know values. Thousands of men have

climbed high in life because they followed the counsels of their mothers.

Study children, too. Why? Because they are natural. They are not conventional. They have not yet been hardened into a standardized pattern. They still say what they think, as no grown people do. Their eyes are still eager and quick and unglazed. They have not yet lost the power to notice and to appreciate. They are full of the joy of life.

What we can learn from children is fully as valuable as what we teach them, perhaps much more valuable. Who would not say that Baden-Powell has learned as much from his Boy Scouts as he has taught them? Often, I think that the secret of the success of great men is that they have remained boy-minded and boy-hearted. They have refused to be fashioned into standardized adults. They have taken their work as play—joyous play. Most of the great men whom I have known have been boy-natured. They were Peter Pans who never grew up.

Study biographies, too, not the dull untrue conventional biographies that have been written by amateurs and flatterers, but the vital biographies that have been written by

expert writers. A good biography shows how others have overcome difficulties and faced dangers. They describe the process by which a strong man builds up his career. They make us ambitious and venturesome. They put iron in our blood. Is not every religion founded on a biography? Is not every history a series of biographies of great men? And if it had been truly written, would it not include the biographies of great women as well?

All great writing must have a human interest. People love to read about people. They never tire of it. The newspapers and magazines know this. They seldom print a picture unless there are people in it. Even if it is a picture of a machine, there should be a man or a girl operating it. It should be humanized.

This is a fact that we have been slow to learn—we who write the literature of business. We talk about things. We show things in our catalogues and our advertisements. That is why they are so dull. There are no people in them.

If you wish to influence people and not merely entertain them, you must write from

their point of view. First picture in your mind the people whom you wish to influence. If you do not know any such people, you cannot write effectively. How can a fisherman catch fish if he does not know what bait to use?

You must know at least one such person. You must know what interests him and what he talks about and what his troubles are. Then you fit your writing, especially the first part of it, to suit his wishes, interests, desires. This rule must be followed by all writers of advertisements and all sales literature.

Mr. Bok, the clever editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, which two million women read every month, always had in mind an average woman in an average town. He even gave her a name. She became very real to him. Before he wrote or accepted any article, he asked himself if such a woman would be pleased to read it. He created his whole magazine every month from her point of view.

A writer is a spokesman. Usually, he can write only for his own class—for people who are like himself. If he wishes to write for other classes of people, he must study them. He must know what they are like. A man

of wide interests and sympathies can rise to the point where he can write for the general public. But few attain this height. Practically every writer is more or less of a specialist.

III

There is a steady demand for writing that contains humour and pathos. This demand comes from all classes. John Wanamaker once told me that his favourite book was *The Rosary*—a novel of pathos, in which a woman marries her lover after he has become blind. Andrew Carnegie told me, too, that his favourite book was *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*—the story of a village doctor who gave his life to serve his villagers. And Frank A. Munsey once told me that of all the elements in fiction, pathos was the rarest and most valuable.

The most popular novelists are those who can create thrills, laughter and tears. There is humour in almost every play and pathos in many of them. The first successful "talkie" was Al Jolson's "Singing Fool"—ninety minutes of humour and pathos. All classes of people love to have their feelings stirred.

It must never be forgotten that it was

Charles Dickens who led the way, in all English-speaking countries at least, in portraying the feelings and the fun of ordinary people. Before him, writers confined their attention to thoughts. They ignored humour and pathos. They ignored ordinary people, too. Shakespeare wrote of the shining few—the Kings and Generals and aristocrats. When he wrote of a working man, he made him a clown or a lout.

Dickens was the first to write of common people and their small affairs. He was the first who wrote of the masses without contempt. He democratized literature. He made Kings and Generals and aristocrats read about Peggotty and little Nell and Sydney Carton. He went into a fisherman's cottage and made it immortal.

He was not influenced by previous writers. There was little that he could learn from any of them. He created a new kind of literature. He turned the spot-light on the poor, not upon Kings and Queens. He brought laughter and tears into literature. He was a pioneer in a new field and his influence has been worldwide and lasting.

Every writer should have an eye for the

pathos of the events that happen in everyday life. Here is a treasure-house for writers. To those who have sympathy and imagination, the daily press is full of suggestions.

Here, for example, is a perfectly written short article from *Pearson's Weekly*. It was, no doubt, clipped out and kept and re-read by thousands of girl workers. It has rhythm and pathos. Here it is :

"GIRL WHOSE DREAM CAME TRUE

The story of Edith Taylor, the factory girl composer, as told this week, is a complete little novel in itself. And it has a happy ending.

Not many would have thought, if they had seen the little factory girl, in Reading, clocking in at the great biscuit factory, that she had a dream of creating music and song.

But many factory girls have such dreams. They may be selling their labour for a few shillings a week, but they have their dreams of travel, music, art, love, a bungalow—all manner of things. Not even the roar of the machinery in the big factories can drown the whisper of imagination in a factory girl's mind. Often, she sits at her work with a smile.

She has her own little private cinema. 'Some day,' she thinks, 'my dream may come true.'

Her back is tired. She is working like a machine. She is doing the same thing, over and over again. But

she has her thoughts. No one but herself knows what they are.

Then, sometimes, only too seldom, the hope becomes the reality. There is a fade-out of the factory and a close-up of the dream. And you and I never tire of reading of these dreams that have come true."

The reason why we must deal with feelings rather than with bare facts is because the emotions are older and stronger than the intellect. They are hundreds of thousands of years older. As Vernon Lee truly says—"Writing is an emotional art."

There is a much-debated question—"should a writer use slang?" Yes, he may, if the slang word is in general use and not too vulgar. You need not be a purist. The purist market is a small one. The slang market is large and growing rapidly. It is the largest of all markets in the United States.

If you would use a slang word in conversation, in the presence of ladies, you may use it in writing. There is no longer the bar between spoken and written language that there used to be. Slang is now used everywhere in conversation. It is often very effective and expresses a new meaning. The slang of to-day is the correct language of to-morrow.

In this matter of slang, O. Henry set the pace for the writers who followed him. He was the Dickens of America. He wrote of the dramatic events in the life of common people. He used slang. He misused words. He mixed his metaphors. He threw grammar on the scrap-heap. He was illiterate joyously. He split infinitives. He would split anything to make a laugh. Yet his books have been sold by the million and professors are now calling him "one of the greatest masters of modern fiction."

As to writing in dialect, why not? Most of the instructors in writing classes protest against it, but if actors and actresses use dialect on the stage, why not use it in writing?

The main point with regard to dialect is that it must be correct. It must be true to life. It is absurd to make a Chinese talk like a graduate of Oxford, or to make a farm labourer talk like a commercial traveller. Dialect often gives a touch of realism that adds greatly to the interest and the effect of the writing.

A writer can to-day deal with life in all its forms. His ability is not a cloistered virtue, as it was in the Middle Ages. His greatest

difficulty, in these days of mediocrity in writing, is to take the data that he has gathered and shape it and polish it until it is worthy of the name of literature.

A great writer adds something of himself to his data. His writing is not photographic, any more than great paintings are. He interprets facts. He emphasizes. He, too, paints pictures, but in words. He aims always to create a piece of writing that is complete in itself and unforgettable.

He is an artist in words. He picks his words as carefully as a painter selects his colours. He thinks of their sound as well as of their meaning. He eliminates any word that jars or that does not fit into the theme in any way.

He makes a fair use of alliteration, because it makes a sentence pleasant to read and easy to remember. It catches the attention, too. If an outfitter says in his advertising—"Go to Grant's for Gloves," the sentence sticks in the mind.

Alliteration helps as well to make a sentence musical, as in the sentence—"The swish, swish of the shimmering sea washing over the shingle." Even Tennyson did not dis-

dain it. He used it to make his smooth lines still smoother, as, for instance, in his perfect poem—" The Lord of Burleigh " :

" Weeping, weeping late and early,
Walking up and pacing down,
Deeply mourned the Lord of Burleigh,
Burleigh-house by Stamford-town."

Words can be so used that their very sound helps to express the meaning. The best instance of this is in Pope's lines :

" When Ajax strives some rock's vast
weight to throw,
The line, too, lingers, and the words
move slow."

As you can see, every word in the first line must be pronounced slowly and laboriously, with a sense of effort.

As to rhythm in writing, only the ablest writers can attain to it. All poets can. It gives a grace and ease to writing. It must only be used when appropriate. It should not be used in a book on engineering. But it can be used in advertisements and sales booklets. One of the most successful booklets I have ever written was for a piano firm. Its title was " When I Choose my own Piano."

It was appropriate. It was like the first line of a song.

Great strength is given to a sentence if it is made to rise to a climax, if stronger and stronger words are used. Harold Herd gives this excellent example :

" It is whispered in the harem, it is chattered in the bazaar, it is bandied about in the wine-shops, it is noised abroad in the streets, it is proclaimed from the house-tops, yet you would have me believe that it is news to you."

As for epigrams, use them if you are skilful enough to make them. They are the condensation of thought. An epigram should be an expression in the fewest possible words of a general truth. It helps to make writing pithy, rememberable and instructive.

Every writer should be as terse as he can. He should avoid a slovenly, over-worded style. He should do his best to create epigrams. They lift the style to a higher level. No one can make them unless he has a wide knowledge of his subject and a precise use of words.

As to over-statement and under-statement, the former is popular in America and the

latter is popular in Great Britain. There is more emphasis in under-statement, as over-statement makes the mind discount the whole phrase. Superlatives should be used sparingly. The word " best " is now being barred out of all good advertising, as even when it is true, it is apt not to be believed.

Always avoid argument. It seldom convinces anyone. It creates antagonism. Tell people the facts and let them form their own conclusions. Tell them what you have to say simply and fairly. You can trust people to make their own opinions, once you have given them the data.

To argue is to weaken your own case You may be logical, but who cares for logic ? If you insist that your opinion is the only right one, people will think that there is a kink in your brain. And they may be right.

We have at last after centuries of intolerance reached a pleasant period of toleration. There is a dislike of intolerance and of people who claim to be the sole possessors of any kind of truth. There is a spirit of live and let live—think and let think. This is the reason why people instinctively dislike argument. They do not want any opinion thrust upon them.

Every article must have a plan, just as a story has a plot. It must not be a jumble of words. If it is only a report on a boiler, there are certain facts that ought to be mentioned first, and there are certain conclusions or suggestions to be mentioned last. An article must be orderly.

In the essays of Macaulay, the ideas and facts move along with the orderliness of a parade. Not one paragraph can be taken out without making a gap. There is an orderly movement of thought from the first paragraph to the last. No other writer has been able to marshal his matter as well as he.

My own method of writing is to gather data from newspapers, magazines, books, observation and conversation. I add other data from my personal experience and from my own opinions. I put this data upon cards, $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size.

As soon as I have decided upon a subject, I look through my library, my clippings and my cards to see how much matter I have upon the subject. Then I go to my favourite bookstore and ask if there are any books that will help me.

Then I do more or less of personal research.

Before I wrote my *Romance of Steel*, I visited thirteen iron and steel works in the United States and Germany. Before I wrote *The History of the Telephone*, I interviewed more than fifty of the creators of telephony, including Bell, Watson, Vail, Carty, Scribner and Thayer. I studied the making and selling of telephone service in a dozen factories and offices. I mention this to show that writing is not to be dashed off. There is often a vast amount of preliminary work to be done, before a sentence is written.

Any reporter, with ten years' experience, can dash off a thousand words at a moment's notice on almost any subject. That is the technique of newspaper work. It must be quick—quick—quick, and anybody must be able to write anything. But in this book I am referring to good writing, not to slapdash journalism.

There must be preparation for all informative writing. Readers cannot always be deceived by fluency. A writer should know what has already been written on his theme. He must have some new matter or a new point of view. His article must not be a rehash of what has already been written. And he

must put his new matter in the first part of his article.

My habit is to assemble all that I know and think on my subject upon cards. I put one idea or fact upon every card. Then, when I have enough data, I spread the cards out on my desk and arrange them in order.

This enables me to have a sequence of thought—to have first things first and last things last. It prevents jumbled-up writing. It prevents wordiness or mere fluency. It limits me to what I know or think. When the cards are arranged in order, I begin to write, and go through the cards from the first to the last.

The making of an effective speech requires a technique of its own. Some of our ablest writers cannot speak at all. At least, they ought not to do so. Too many of them try to speak without having learned. They stammer and stutter and lose all their skill when they are in front of an audience.

I have dealt with this subject in another book—*A Complete Public Speaking Course*. The fact is that speaking requires a certain temperament which many good writers do

not possess. There are ten good writers to one good speaker.

As to the writing of a speech, the first thing to be said is that speeches ought not to be written, unless they are to be delivered on a special occasion and are in any sense official.

A speech should be prepared. It should be planned. Key-words and ideas should be written out. But a man should not speak at all unless he has a fluency that will enable him to speak extemporaneously. A memorized speech falls flat. There is no life in it. And it does not carry conviction.

Having never written a play, I can give little advice to playwrights, though they may, perhaps, learn something in a general way from this book. As a lifelong playgoer I have the right to say this at least, that a play should be like a football game. Every sentence should make a change in the situation. The action should never stop.

There must be, above all, a continuity of interest. One event should lead to another. There should be no hold-ups in the development of the story. No part of the theme should be dwelt upon too long. Even Bernard Shaw, who sins most in this respect, cannot depend

altogether upon his epigrams and his twisted meanings. He is compelled to bring in action every now and then.

In effective writing and speaking, there is one General Plan that I have found very useful. It is as follows :

(1) Favourable Attention.

(2) The Common Danger.

(3) What To Do.

(4) It Can be Done.

This is, in my opinion, the one best plan for every article or speech that is designed to move people to action. It creates interest. It is not mere criticism. It convinces. It proves that the speaker or writer has studied and more or less mastered his subject, and may be sufficiently competent to become a leader.

Favourable Attention. This means that the speaker or writer must connect himself with his audience or his readers. He must prove in some way that he is one of them. He must praise or congratulate his audience, if he is a speaker. He must say something in appreciation of the town or city. He should point to what the town has already achieved.

This creates favourable attention. It gives him the good-will and respect of the audience.

THE COMMON DANGER. There is always a difficulty or a waste or a loss. The audience is menaced in some way. The speaker must make himself the spokesman of the audience. He should say "we" and not "I." He should paint a vivid picture of the impending danger.

WHAT TO DO. The third step is to present a plan of action. The speaker or writer must solve the problem, else he is a mere grumbler. He must be creative. People listen with interest to iconoclasts and agitators, but they do not make leaders of them unless they point out what can be done.

IT CAN BE DONE. The conclusion of the article or speech should create confidence and enthusiasm. It should strike a high note. There should be humour and a belittling of the difficulties. And there should be, too, a vivid picture of the future, as it may be when the danger is averted.

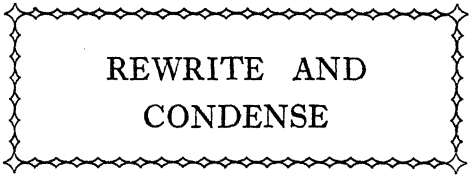
All through, the speaker or writer should present his ideas, not as his own, but as the ideas of his hearers or readers. He should say "as everyone in this hall knows," and

" as everyone of us has often thought." He must not speak nor write as a critic nor an outsider, or his words will not be effective.

This is an old rule for public speakers. I have done no more than to put it into a definite formula. Every speech of Demosthenes was built on this plan. It can never be superseded as a plan for convincing people and moving them to some united action.

The ablest political speakers continually use this formula—first, win over the audience by appreciating what it has already done ; second, point out the present danger ; third, show how it can be averted ; and fourth, inspire confidence and enthusiasm.

As you can see, this plan can be used not only in speeches, but in articles or books as well. It can be used in the writing of sales literature or in any plea for social reform. It should be used by anyone who aspires to leadership in his town or his trade or his profession or his nation. It is the most effective way of using words to persuade and to inspire a mass of people to action in their own interests.


REWRITE AND
CONDENSE

## Chapter III

## REWRITE AND CONDENSE

THE art of writing is not learned easily. Most people can scribble stale commonplace stuff, but few people know how to write well. Not many have ideas that are worth while, and fewer still know how to express them.

Writing is like music. It cannot be learned without practice—" every day a line." Whenever you see something that attracts your attention, put it into words. Express it in such a way that it will interest others.

When you have an idea, write it. Then rewrite it. Improve it. Put it into the fewest possible words, the right words. Dash off an idea if you like, but do more than that. Polish it. Do your best with it. Work over it, as an artist works over a painting.

When I was a lad of eighteen, I had a passion for putting into words the sounds of

the forest. I tried to express the language of the wind and the birds. I wrote down twenty-one words of the thrush language, but there were about ten other words of a thrush's song that I could never write. We have no such sounds in human speech. Our alphabet would need more letters to write the whole of the thrush language.

Neither could I write the language of a rill that falls over rocks. The sweet gurgling of the falling water cannot be expressed either in words or music. But the effort to express the language of the forest taught me to appreciate the sound of words and the possibilities of language.

Good writing must be built as a cathedral is built. There are laws of verbal architecture that must be known and obeyed. There must be harmony. The sound must suit the sense. And there must be nothing that mars the general effect.

First, write what you want to say. That is your raw material. Then proceed to manufacture it. Boil it down. Cut out every unnecessary word. Pick and eliminate until you find the one right word.

Write and rewrite. It is better to say a

thing in ten words than in fifty. The most interesting writers are epigrammatic. Some are almost telegraphic. If you can condense a whole page into a couple of perfect sentences, do it.

The worst writing in the world is the jargon of the Civil Service—the language of laws, forms and regulations. Here are four examples of it :

(1) "When the year ending September 30th, 1914, is adopted by a brewer for the purpose of computing standard barrelage, and the brewer proves to the Commissioners that he has closed any brewery and it has not since been used as a brewery, so much of any beer so brewed at the closed brewery as the Commissioners think just in the circumstances shall be deemed to be beer brewed at the brewer's brewery."

(2) "If the maximum weekly payment would, had the incapacity been total incapacity, have amounted with such addition, if any, as is provided by sub-section (2) of this section, to less than twenty-five shillings, the weekly payment in case of partial incapacity shall be a sum bearing the same proportion to the said difference as the said maximum weekly

payment with such addition as aforesaid bears to the amount of the average weekly earnings of the workman before the accident."

(3) " In the case of assessments on income from dominion and foreign possessions, where the tax paid by any person under assessments made upon him for the first three complete years of assessment during which he has been the owner of the possession exceeds the total amount which would have been paid if he had been assessed for each of those years on the actual amount of the income of each year."

(4) In prewar days the following notice was printed on the labels of the gum-pots in the Stationery Office of the Government :

" In ordinary use the best and most nearly immediate result is obtained by using only such an amount of gum as will just uniformly moisten the surface without leaving any obvious excess to delay drying, the condition to be aimed at being that of a gummed postage stamp just moistened as ordinarily applied to a letter."

As you can see, all this might have been expressed in two words—"Apply thinly." The fact is that a bureaucracy prefers this

jargon. It has created a language of its own, as it enables it to make its own interpretations. Lawyers, too, prefer it, as it creates more lawsuits.

Many judges have protested against the incomprehensible jargon in which our laws are written. Even they cannot understand it. We need another Coke or Blackstone to simplify our laws and put them into clear and simple language.

Good writing is the exact opposite of this jargon of law and the Civil Service. It is concise. It is the clear expression of an idea, not the concealment of it.

Wordiness completely destroys the sparkle and vividness of writing. As Dr. Johnson said—" Tediousness is the most fatal of faults." Everyone avoids a bore. The moment that an article or a book becomes dull and boring, that moment it is put down. That is the end of it.

As Harold Herd says, a writer should not say—" Whatever liabilities he may have seen fit to contract subsequent to that date, would perforce have had to go unmet, from sheer inability to discover the wherewithal to pay." No. He should say—" He had no money."

Every written article should be rigorously pruned. It is a rule among editors—" when in doubt about a word, take it out." There is seldom an article or an advertisement or a story that cannot be cut, say the editors. Nothing should be put in that slows down the flow of the thought or the course of the story. There should be no obstructive paragraphs.

It is not wise to overwork a word. Many writers use " very " too often. It often weakens a sentence. It is better to write " a great statesman " than " a very great statesman." There are several words, like " very," that were formerly used for emphasis, but which have now lost their force and become stale. They often slip into conversation and writing.

As a Professor once said to his class—" Do not use ' very,' except on very rare occasions." Probably he was the same Professor who said —" Do not use a preposition to end up with."

Every writer should have a good Dictionary. I use the New Standard Dictionary (Funk & Wagnalls.) It gives more than 400,000 words. It is almost as good as an Encyclopædia. It gives the names of famous people, and towns

and cities. Such a Dictionary is indispensable. It should be on a stand at the left hand of the writer, so that it can be consulted quickly.

As to how many words a writer should write in a day, there is no rule. But he should be able to write 1,000 words a day, if he wishes to earn his living by writing.

Sir Phillip Gibb wrote his book—*The Street of Adventure*, which contains 150,000 words, in a month. Margaret Kennedy, on the other hand, wrote her book—*The Constant Nymph*, three times before she sent it to the publishers. And Edwin Markham worked, off and on, for seven years on his famous short poem—"The Man with the Hoe," before he gave it to the public.

Gray, too, spent seven years in writing his poem—"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," and he made it so perfect that it will never die. Green wrote the first chapter of his *Making of England* ten times before he was satisfied with it.

R. L. Stevenson wrote many of his chapters eight times. He once said—"No one ever had such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it, day in, day out, and I frankly

believe, thanks to my dire industry, I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world."

Balzac often laboured over a single phrase for hours. As many as ten proofs would have to be sent back to him. Nothing would satisfy him but perfection.

Tennyson, also, toiled over his lines. Most of his poems read so smoothly that they seem to have been written in bursts of inspiration, but they were not. As he once said—"I smoked six pipes over that one line."

After writing his *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, De Quincey spent every day for six months in making it perfect. He weighed every word. He agonized over it. He struggled to attain a perfection of utterance. And he produced a book that will live for ever—one of the most superb examples of what can be done by the art of writing that has even been produced in any language.

Too many of the writers of to-day began their careers by writing for the daily press. This means that they learned to write quickly but not well. Journalism requires, above all, speed. The paper must come out. The writing must be finished by a certain time,

and the time is never long enough to permit rewriting.

A writer should protect himself against this demand for speed. He should remember that his rate of pay depends upon the quality of his writing. No writer, not even the ablest, can dash off an article and get fivepence a word for it.

There are now so many bad, careless, speedy writers that it is worth while to take time and pains and to become one of the few good writers. The pay for ordinary writing is low. It will always be low. It ought to be low. But the pay for good writing is higher than it has ever been in the history of printing. There is now an international market for every masterpiece. It pays to rewrite and condense.

# THE TECHNIQUE OF WRITING SHORT STORIES

## Chapter IV

# THE TECHNIQUE OF WRITING SHORT STORIES

KIPLING set the fashion for short stories forty years ago. Before then, in Great Britain, the short story was almost despised. It was not appreciated as it was in France, as a way by means of which a great genius could express himself.

But Kipling's vivid stories could not be despised, and soon scores of writers, the best as well as the worst, began to pour a flood of short stories upon the public. To-day the editors of popular magazines are swamped by this flood. Never before were so many trashy and amateurish stories being written. Not one out of a hundred is well done. There is a tremendous output, but the average of quality is very low.

A short story has a technique of its own. It is not a condensed novel. It must be a

tale of one outstanding event. It should have a climax. It should not have irrelevant characters, as a play or a novel may have. The story must run straight along on its way to the climax.

It must be easy to read. This ease of reading is secured by having action. Above all, it must have ACTION. It should be vivid, not reflective. It should be as different from an essay as possible.

The first paragraph is very important. If it is well written, the editor reads further. If it is exceptionally bad, he rejects the story. It is like the headline of an advertisement. It must attract favourable attention and sound the keynote of the story.

It should hint at the strangest fact in the story and create curiosity. It should give a quick glimpse at something which compels attention. It is the display paragraph of the story.

In the beginning of every story, there must be the creation of curiosity. There must be, all the way through, suspense. The reader must be thrown off the track. The explanation must be concealed until the last page.

The spot-light is thrown here and there, but never towards the right place until the end.

Sometimes there can be a series of crises, with the most dramatic at the end. The reader is hurled along from one excitement to another. Between the crises there is suspense. What next ?

A story that is written like this grips the reader. He cannot lay it down until he reaches the end. And it makes a vivid impression upon his mind.

A short story should be emotional. It should create a feeling in the mind of the reader—an emotion of joy, amusement, horror, pathos, surprise or desire. It overcomes the reader's inertia. It moves him in some way. If he can read it in a casual listless way, it has not been well written.

A successful short story must not have an expressed moral. No one, in these days, reads tracts. The moral may be there, but it must not be mentioned. The story must not preach. Sermons are not popular nor effective.

A short story must not be a means of expressing the prejudices of the author. It

must not be evident propaganda. Modern readers do not like to be lectured. Nobody in this generation reads moral tales such as were written fifty years ago. Even George Macdonald's perfectly written books are unknown to the young people of to-day.

At the same time, it is possible to write a successful short story with a purpose. A play such as "Journey's End" or a novel such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* is propaganda against war, but the propaganda is conveyed by the story. It is not directly expressed. An opinion is indirectly conveyed to the mind. There is no more efficient way of instructing the public than this.

As to the portrayal of character, this is best done by conversation and by events. Do not say a character is irascible. Bring him in and let him growl. Let him fling his hat on the floor. Let him spill his glass of beer or his cup of tea. Let him roar because some one was moved his pipe. Let the talk and action the characters show what sort of people they are.

Every writer of short stories should have a Plot Book. He should find his plots in the newspapers and the police courts and in the

events of his own life, as well as in his imagination.

Plots may be found almost anywhere. Many a time one has been found in a cottage or in a conversation with a taxi-driver. There is not a village in which a writer may not find a plot. Once a writer goes plot-seeking, he may find plots in all manner of places.

The less skill a writer has, or the more he wishes to interest the mass of readers, the more he must depend on his plot. An amateur writer can seldom paint characters or atmosphere. He must go in for action. He should not try to write like Conrad nor Mary Borden nor Edith Wharton. He must depend upon movement and events.

Some plots have become stale. The "triangle" plot has been overdone. So have the "mistaken identity" plot and the "fortune-making hero" plot. These stale plots can now be used only by the cleverest writers, who introduce some unexpected novelty into them.

A stale plot will kill a story that is technically good. No story will be accepted by an editor if the ending can be foreseen from the first.

There must be an element of mystery or uncertainty or the attention of the reader is lost.

There is now a standardized plot for detective stories and it is becoming stale. There is first a murder—a strange and mysterious murder. A mere theft is not enough. Always there is a skilled observer or detective, usually not a member of the police force. The police are invariably on the wrong track in their search for the murderer.

Blame is then thrown on one person after another. The plot thickens. The chapters are full of suspicion. The problem grows more and more insoluble. Then, the skilled observer, by noticing several trivial things, moves towards the unsuspected criminal. Suddenly, the spot-light of blame is thrown in a new direction and the book ends with his capture or his suicide.

The plot, unquestionably, is the bones of the short story. Something new and striking must happen. A flow of graceful language is not enough. There must be a plot and as to the making of good plots, there is no end.

I would advise every writer of short stories to study the stories of Donn Byrne and John Russell. These two men wrote virile pictorial

English. Byrne was killed in a motor-car accident, but Russell is still writing.

No other writer can begin a story better than Russell. Here, for instance, are the first paragraphs of three of his stories

(1) "All the world meets beneath the towering spire of Shway Dagohn, which pins back the clouds and throws a shadow between India and the China Sea. All paths in the East tend toward that great pagoda with its mighty shaft of gold. Around the sweep of its pedestal, among its terraced mazes, is one of the common crossroads where men as various as their skins and their faiths come to mingle; to worship or to wonder; seeking each in his own fashion whatever clue to the meaning of things he can take from that vast finger which carries the eye and the soul up and up and points for ever to the heart of mystery."

From "*The Slanted Beam.*"

(2) "Tennison was a gambler. When a coral reef pared the keel plate off the *Evelyn Bird* and she sank in three minutes somewhere near the Howick Isles one rough black night, he preferred to lay his own private bet on a chicken-coop. The *Evelyn's* boats were few

and old, and the *Evelyn's* people were hurried, and together they disappeared in the dark and the smother like things sponged from a slate. But the chicken-coop came ashore right side with care."

From " *The Winning Hand* " :

(3) " He came out of mystery and he tarried for a while on Leper's Island before he went back to his own place in a great storm of wind. So the natives will tell you to this day, and their tale grows wondrous with the sulphur and brimstone of Melanesian superstition. They still call him the One-Eyed Devil. They still venerate the name. Strange that the fate of ' Duke ' Forsayth, with his singular gifts and his single damning flaw, should have become a legend to teach little black children in the far, wild Archipelago of the New Hebrides ! . He would have appreciated that himself as the last irony of a career no less ironic than pitiful, and very pitiful too."

From " *The One-Eyed Devil* " :

In general, there are two classes of short story writers—the realists and the idealists, but Donn Byrne and John Russell belonged to neither class. They blended the real with

the ideal. They cast a glamour over their facts.

Henry James believed that the aim of fiction is to portray real life. Alphonse Daudet believed that it must entertain. Both are right. There is always a demand for both realistic and idealistic stories. But only the Masters of Words can write the idealistic ones or blend realism and idealism together.

The most popular short stories have happy endings. Very few novels have been "best sellers" that have not ended happily. This is true, at least, in Great Britain and America. It is not as general in Germany, France and Russia. Most Russian stories end in gloom and despair.

The one best book on short story writing, in my opinion, is *Short Story Writing for Profit*, by Michael Joseph. It has run through nine or ten editions and is still selling. It is practical and readable and instructive. It has improved the writing of thousands of people. It is published by Hutchinson, 6s. net.

A short story should contain from 3,000 to 4,000 words. A 10,000-word story is too long for most magazines. It should not be an anecdote spun out, although most of O

Henry's stories are little more than this. To make 3,000 words out of an incident can only be done by the cleverest of writers.

A story of 4,000 words is worth from £20 to £30 in England and four or five times as much in the United States. A number of American magazines pay from £100 to £500 for a first-class short story by an author whose name is well known.

A young writer must not mind rejections. Again and again, his stories will be refused by editors. When W. L. George first began to write, he had his stories come back to him 723 times. But he kept on writing and eventually none of them came back.

The power of short stories has not been appreciated by the writers of business literature. To write an effective short story is difficult. Therefore it is seldom done by advertising men and Sales Managers.

What a story the Cunard Line might have—"The Story of Cunard," telling the tale of Samuel Cunard, the Canadian who was a descendant of a British Empire Loyalist, and who came to England at the close of his life and created the greatest of all ocean liners!

What a story the firm of Avery's might have —" The 300-year Story of Avery Service ! " It would begin with Watt and Boulton and run up through three centuries, showing the development of weighing machines that can weigh a loaded railway truck or a rabbit's hair.

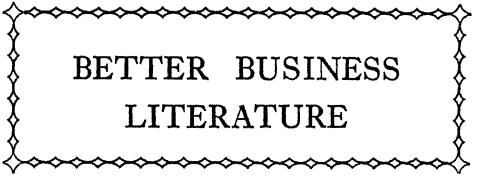
There is romance as well as fact in trade and commerce, and business men have never made the most of it. There have been merchant adventurers. The story of jute is the history of Dundee. The story of rayon is a British story, not French, from beginning to end. It began with Mercer and led up to Courtauld. The story of rubber is a tale of adventure, beginning in the forests of Brazil and leading through Kew Gardens to Malaysia. And so on.

Back of every commodity in every shop there is a fascinating story that might be told, if only business men appreciated the romance that lies behind trade and had the gift of story-telling.

The pity is that those who know have not the power to tell, and those who have the power do not know. Some day, this great new field of literature will be developed. Either

story-tellers may learn to look with wise eyes at trade and commerce, or business men may learn to write.

There are a thousand short stories on the romance of industry and science, all waiting to be written. There is the subject matter for Epics—for stories that will never die. Some day, there will come a writer greater than Dickens—greater than Balzac, and these stories will be told.


BETTER BUSINESS
LITERATURE

## CHAPTER V

# BETTER BUSINESS LITERATURE

YOU may study language for several reasons. You may study its structure and origins. You may study it, as a poet does, for its fine and delicate meanings. Or you may study it as a tool—a creative tool, for the building of a business or the instruction of the public.

In this book, it is treated as a tool, as a means of accomplishing a purpose. This book answers such questions as these :

How can writing be used for the selling of goods ?

Or for the education of customers ?

Or for the creation of good-will ?

Or for the shaping of public opinion on commercial or national matters ?

Effective writing is a very different thing

from literary writing. It is purposeful. It is not merely to interest and amuse. It is intended to produce a certain result. And it is judged by its efficiency.

Most of the writing done by business men is amateurish and crude, as you can see by reading annual reports, catalogues, booklets and most advertisements. Few men in the business world have ever learned how to write. Probably not five per cent. of them could write an article that any first-class magazine would buy.

It is an unfortunate fact that most businesses are more or less dumb. They are poor writers and worse speakers. They have under-valued the power of written and spoken words.

That is one reason why the world is ruled by talkers and writers, not by business men. That is why, in most countries, the business men are like blind hens, scratching up worms for the politicians to snatch away. That is why trade and commerce are everywhere in danger. The creators of business are not Masters of Words.

Business men allow the non-commercial classes—the teachers, parsons, authors, pro-

fessors, journalists and propagandists to do the talking and the writing. They allow them to write the books and the newspapers and the magazines. They allow them to educate the children. They allow them to do the whole work of instruction and entertainment. They allow them to create public opinion and then they wonder at the unpopularity of successful business men and at the oppressive laws by which business is restricted and destroyed.

Now that business has become highly organized, it must learn to guide public opinion. It must protect itself. It must not be at the mercy of cub reporters and political shouters and anti-commercial novelists.

Business men must learn how to write and how to speak in public. They must not neglect a power that can be destructive to their companies. They must develop better business magazines and trade papers. They must read and write business books. They must give business a voice. They must evolve out of the dumb animal class. Now that every silly ass in the nation has a vote, this duty has become imperative.

The fact is that a sort of lingo has grown up in business. You can see it in most busi-

ness letters and advertisements. It is bombastic and dull. Few read it with interest. Still fewer believe it. It is the voice of the clerk, in the writing of letters ; and it is the voice of the coster, in the writing of advertisements.

This lingo has grown stale and ineffective. Hundreds of thousands of pounds are wasted by it in advertising. It has lost whatever power it had. Reading matter to-day is plentiful. And only the most interesting reading matter has any power to influence the public.

Most of our so-called " literature " in the business world is as clumsy as an elephant dancing. It has no style—no charm—no technique. The men who pay for it do not appreciate good writing. They waste their money on stale unreadable stuff.

Never before were there so many amateurs in the writing game. The news-stands are packed with magazines and books. All the writing in these has been paid for. Most of it is inferior. Very little of it is first-class. But the standards of popular writing are steadily being raised. There is a demand for good writers. And business men must not ignore it.

Writing must be developed as one of the

business-building forces. We cannot expect literary men to write advertisements. They do not know how. They know very little of business. They know nothing at all of salesmanship or efficiency or finance. Also, they are too self-conscious. Always, they put their own reputations first. They are not business men.

Many books are now being written on business by professors, especially in Germany and the United States. Most of these books are of very little value. Why? Because a professor is academic. He cannot select the true from the false. He believes his statistics. He is not a practical man and never can be. He can only write about business. He can never tell what ought to be done. He is an instructor of boys, not men. He can only discuss. He can never decide. There is a whole wide world of difference between these two verbs.

It is generally agreed that a man cannot write on medical science unless he is a Doctor, and that he cannot write on law unless he is a lawyer. But any little tomtit of a novelist can write a book on business and his stupidities are taken seriously. There is no general opinion as yet that a man must know some-

thing about business before he writes a book on it.

This task of giving business a voice must fall mainly upon advertising men. They must equip themselves for this task by learning more about business and more about the art of writing. They are the natural links between business and literature.

Advertising is printed salesmanship, yet many advertising men have never had any experience in the selling of goods. To be effective, it must be well written, yet many advertising men have no standing at all as professional writers. They have never learned how to write. This is an extraordinary fact.

An advertiser will pay £1,200 for a full-page advertisement and the writing of it is entrusted to a young man who has never learned either writing or salesmanship. This folly has become so costly and so wasteful that it is not likely to continue. Now that advertising rates have risen so high, the skill of advertising men must be developed to a higher point. The words and pictures that are put in the full-page must be worthy of the expense.

It is safe to say that in all business writing

there should, if possible, be NEWS. Many people do not read books. Many do not read essays nor leading articles. But everybody reads the news. If an advertisement has a news value, its pulling power is greatly increased. The most effective advertisements, usually, are those that are written in the form of announcements. Advertising does not pay if it is stale shop-talk or the mere persuasion of people to buy.

A certain very competent advertising agent in London was asked to write the advertising for a new brand of goods. He asked—"What is the news about these goods? In what way are they different?"

He was told that they were not different. There was no news. The goods were in every way ordinary. Nothing was new but the brand.

He refused to write the advertising. He was right. The advertisements would not pay and he would be blamed for the failure. There must be something that can be said truthfully —something distinctive, or the advertising is likely to be a waste of money. There must be news.

In the writing of sales matter to interest

women, one point to remember is that women like to read informative articles on how to do their various jobs as housewives. The *Ladies' Home Journal* has always had a great number of these " how to " articles. This is the main reason why it has the largest circulation among women's magazines.

Women never tire of reading articles on domestic and personal technique. A housewife has to know hundreds of things in order to carry on the work of her home. And most of her knowledge comes from reading.

In the preparation of business reports, the first thing is to gather and verify the data. The next thing is to classify it and the third thing is to condense it. Most reports are too long. The data is usually not digested and presented in a readable convincing way.

If you have 16 facts to report, number them—1, 2, 3, 4, etc. Also, it is a help if you can work out the figures into graphic charts. Do every possible thing to make the facts and figures clear and emphatic. Let them speak for themselves, but make them speak loudly. Often, in a report prepared by a Parliamentary Committee, the most important fact is lost in a mass of verbiage.

As to letter-writing, as a business asset, I have dealt with it in a separate book—*Better Business Letters*. It is a new profession. As to what bad business letters cost us, in loss of trade and loss of good-will, no one knows. Many a bad letter has cost a lawsuit. Many a letter has cost thousands of pounds.

Good business and personal letters are a great asset to any man or any firm. They create goodwill and remove troubles and add to the profits and pleasures of life. A man can create a Letter-power by studying the art of writing and by remembering that every letter should be as personal, as courteous and as practical as possible.

One London firm has a list of 160,000 customers, all secured by well-written sales letters and advertisements. One Mail Order house in the United States has 7,000,000 customers, all secured by good writing. Not one customer was brought in by face-to-face salesmanship. This proves that the art of good writing has been undervalued by most business men.

Good writing! It can create fortunes as well as fame. It can do as much for business companies as it has done for authors and

playwrights. When business men overcome this blight of dumbness and learn how to write, many of their most difficult problems will be solved. And business itself will rise to a higher level and receive the honour and the appreciation which it deserves.

# CONDITIONS TO IMPROVE WRITING

## Chapter VI

# CONDITIONS TO IMPROVE WRITING

EVERY writer will find that there is one part of the day when he can write most easily. Edwin Markham composes his poems in the early morning before breakfast. He awakes with poetical fancies running through his mind. Many writers, on the contrary, are at their best in the evening. Their brains do not become active during the day. Norman Duncan's method was to take a dozen packets of cigarettes into his study, lock the door, and work without a break for ten hours or longer. When his novel was finished, he was usually in a state of collapse and had to spend several weeks in recuperating.

The point is that there are no rules for the time and place of writing. Every writer must follow his own nature or his own whim in the matter. A man who has been trained as a reporter can usually write at any time and anywhere. He has acquired the power of

concentration and of being indifferent to disturbances.

Most writers will find that they should not work more than three hours at a stretch. After three hours, the brain becomes fatigued. The words do not come so easily and the standard of writing is lowered.

Even in factories, we have found that rest periods increase the output. More bad work is usually done in the afternoon than in the morning. The best way to write, I have found is in short quick spurts, with a half hour's rest after each spurt. This is the rule in all sports, and it is a wise rule for writers. The brain must be allowed to recuperate.

Goethe's formula for creative thinking was to first gather the data and study it carefully. Then he gave his brain an hour of perfect rest. He walked in the fields or sat beside a river. When he came back to his desk his brain was rested and his thoughts began to flow.

One thing is clear, that a writer must give his brain a fair chance to do its best. He must write under favourable conditions. He must not have a sense of irritation. He must be let alone. Few business men can write

well in their offices. There are too many distractions.

All my writing has been done at home, in a house on a hill, where I could look out of my window and see a great expanse of green country. I was born and bred in a Canadian forest, and I have always had to have trees around me when I write. Other writers, I have no doubt, have been able to write best when they were in view of the sea.

Some writers and composers have done their writing at the end of convivial evenings. This may have been either a habit or a necessity. Brains are strange things. The conditions that suit one brain would destroy another. It is certain that both liquor and tobacco tend to slow the processes of thought in most brains and to lower the quality of the output. But there have been many notable exceptions to this rule.

It goes without saying that a writer should have plenty of sleep. His greatest enemy is insomnia. Brain-work is far more exhausting than body-work. There are few writers who have not had breakdowns. They have neglected recuperation. They have driven their brains too hard.

The matter of food, too, is of no small importance. No writer can do good work after a heavy meal. The stomach and the brain should not be driven at full speed at the same time. They should work alternately. If a writer works in the morning, he should have a light breakfast. If he works in the evening, he should not have a five-course dinner. A cup of tea or coffee is a great help if the brain has become fatigued.

Fresh air, also, is a necessity. A writer should not sit in a fog of his own breath. His study window should be open at the top, and at the bottom as well, if there is no wind to blow his papers. Bad air will soon slow down the processes of the brain.

A writer should have peace of mind. This is not easy to secure. Sometimes it is impossible. Many of the greatest writers have written in spite of martyrdom and pain and almost overwhelming troubles. They wrote with their blood. But this is always a tragedy.

The greatest of all stimulants to the brain is joy. The man who can write in a happy home is one of the most fortunate of men. He is like a sailing ship with a favourable wind

and an open sea. He has no rocks to worry him.

Fortunate is the writer, to, who has someone—a wife or a friend, to whom he can read his best passages. All writers are cheered on by approbation. They love a word of praise. Who does not ?

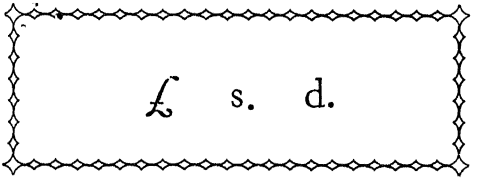
The most stimulating joy of a writer comes from the sense of his growing power of creativeness. He sees his finished product in print. He sees it on the book-stalls and in the book-shops. His writings are being bought. He has begun to have his army of readers. He has arrived. He is no longer an amateur. He has become a professional writer.

Then comes a crisis in his life. He is in danger of becoming the servant of his readers. He is likely to write only as his readers want him to write. This is the Great Temptation. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

On the one hand—royalties and applause. On the other hand—originality and the living of his own life. His publishers are salesmen. They push him on to produce the greatest

number of books for the greatest number of readers.

The wise writer, in my opinion, must above all be true to himself. He must not spend the rest of his life writing imitations of his first " best seller." He must develop his own powers. He must go from strength to strength. He must do what he has not done before. He must seek new worlds to conquer. A writer owes it to the world, as well as to himself, to seek harder and harder tasks, and to make the most of the precious gift of writing that he possesses.


£ s. d.

## Chapter VII

## £.S.D.

IT goes without saying that every writer should try to make his writing Pay. He is a business man to a certain extent. He is a manufacturer of writing. He must consider quality, output and markets, as all other manufacturers do.

As to how far he should go in advertising himself, this is a matter of taste and tactics. In my opinion, he should go as far as he can. This is not an age when modesty brings the quickest or the highest rewards. The point is that if a good writer does not protect his interests and do what he can to create a better market for his writings, he is likely to receive less money than he deserves.

Many young writers are surprised and satisfied if they receive any pay at all for their articles. The first cheque gives them a shock of delight. Often, they continue to be under-

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Many young writers are surprised and satisfied if they receive any pay at all for their articles. The first cheque gives them a shock of delight. Often, they continue to be under-

paid for years, because they do not know the money value of their writing. They are the price-cutters of the writing profession.

Publishers and newspaper owners are not philanthropic. Usually, when they die, they leave large fortunes. They make a handsome profit on the writing that they have bought. And every writer should see to it that he receives the highest market price for his work. Writers have no trade union to protect them. Everyone must protect his own interests.

A vast amount of writing is unfit to print. It is rejected, as it ought to be. There are always more rejections than acceptances. Editors are showered with manuscripts. There are more unskilled amateurs in writing and speaking than there are in any other line, and in this book I am addressing only those who are determined to become professionals.

There is always a steady market for all well-written articles and books on timely subjects. The weekly and monthly magazines and the daily press buy thousands of articles every year, and the English publishers accept and publish annually about 14,000 books.

An article of 400 words should bring in from £1 1s. to £4 4s. from a daily paper.

Most of the weekly papers prefer articles of about 700 words. The rate of pay ranges from a farthing to a shilling a word. The ablest writer receives fifty times as much as one who is unskilled and unknown. And publishers usually pay a royalty of 10 per cent. on actual sales.

For years, I have made it a point, as a seller of writing, to get four prices for most of what I write. When I sell an article, I reserve the book rights. When I have written as many articles on one subject as will make a book, I then publish the book myself, so as to get the publisher's profits. Then I sell the book to foreign publishers and receive either a lump sum or royalties. This multiplicity of profits makes it possible to write carefully, not in haste.

No writer need have a literary agent, but it is often wise and profitable to employ one. The agent has skill in knowing where to send the articles or books. He charges only 10 per cent. I have myself employed Curtis Brown, Limited, for over ten years, to place all my books with foreign publishers, and I have had no reason to regret it. An agent can usually get better terms from a publisher than an author can. He knows, too, how to draw up

a safe contract. Consequently, his services cost nothing. He adds to the writer's net income.

Every writer is protected by the Copyright Act of 1911. This Act gives him the sole right to his work not only for his lifetime, but for his heirs for two generations after his death.

The Act forbids what is called "colourable imitation." This is a vague phrase. The general interpretation is that nothing may be taken from a book verbatim. The facts or ideas may be taken, but they must be re-written. They must not be taken in their original form. There is no copyright in either the subjects or in the titles of books.

The title of a book or article is very important. It may make or mar. A condensed suggestive original phrase is best. One that creates curiosity is sure to increase sales. The wrong title has often spoiled a play or a book.

The best way to select a good title is to first write a dozen titles or a score. Then pick out the one that is most suitable and most likely to attract favourable attention. It may be a phrase or a name or a sentence. Sometimes, not often, it may be a question.

It is wise to study the titles of the most successful plays and books. The most striking title of the year in London theatres was "Wake Up and Dream." And the most successful play that has ever run in London was called "Chu Chin Chow"—a rememberable alliterative title.

There are four ways of writing:

(1) With a fountain pen.

(2) With a typewriter.

(3) Dictating to a typist.

(4) Dictating to an Ediphone or Dictaphone.

For all careful and polished writing, the pen is the best. It is the slowest way, but it gives you time to select the right words and to rewrite and perfect your writing.

If you are a skilled typist, you may write well with a typewriter, but you are less apt to erase and rewrite. The quality is likely to be sacrificed to the output. It may sometimes be wise to write off a first draft on a typewriter and then to rewrite it with a pen. The typewriter gives you what you want to say and the pen puts it into shape.

If you are dictating to a typist, you are more likely to dictate fast than carefully.

Also, there is the consciousness of another person in the room. You are less likely to be helped by moods and feelings. Your writing is apt to be formal rather than effective.

As for the Ediphone or Dictaphone, it is the best of all time-savers, if your main purpose is to write fast. These machines are used by the ablest journalists as well as by business men.

Arthur Brisbane uses the Ediphone for the writing of his famous editorials. He has one in his office, another in his bedroom and a third that he takes with him when he travels. I have used one for years and find that it cuts the time of writing in half.

One of these machines abolishes the drudgery of writing. It doubles a writer's output. Also, it gives a pleasing conversational style. But it should not be used by a writer until he becomes experienced and has developed both his style and his fluency.

If a writer wishes to read a number of other books on writing, I would suggest the following:

*The Handling of Words*, by Vernon Lee.
*On the Study of Words*, by R. C. Trench.

*English in Business*, by French and Uhler.

*The Writer's Guide*, by Harold Herd.

*Secrets of Profitable Writing*, by Max Crombie.

*Short Story Writing*, by Michael Joseph.

*Business Writing*, by S. Roland Hall.

*The Fine Art of Writing*, by H. Robinson Shipherd.

*Some Chapters on Writing English*, by J. H. Gettins.

*Common Faults in Writing English*, by H. Alexander.

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